

HAYTI A LAND OF GREAT UNDEVELOPED NATURAL RESOURCES

Roger W. Babson Discusses Wealth and Future Prospects of Turbulent Little Island Republic

By ROGER W. BABSON.

IT was a bright sunny morning in March when on my way to South America, I stopped at Port au Prince, the capital of the black republic of the island of Hayti. This holds the distinction of being the first to be settled and the last to be developed of the Western Hemisphere. Moreover, I have been told that it contains the richest soil and the greatest possibilities of development of any territory in continental America or the adjoining islands. On the other hand, we all know that it has the worst government of any land in the Western Hemisphere, it being ruled entirely by negroes.

Briefly, the island of Hayti comprises about 10,000 square miles, or a territory equal to the whole of New England, and is divided into two nations. The eastern portion of the island is ruled by the Dominicans and comprises about two-thirds of the island, with a population of 1,500,000, while the western third of the island is ruled by the Government of Hayti and has a population of 2,000,000. The capital of Santo Domingo is Santo Domingo city, while the capital of Hayti is Port au Prince, which was the city I visited.

This city is said to contain 70,000 people, of whom 69,930 are black and seventy are white. It is situated on a hill with a half moon-shaped harbor, with but one wharf. Whether we were unable to moor at this wharf on account of the shallow water or on account of the big wharfage charges I do not know, but at any rate we anchored at a distance from shore, very close to the United States battleship South Carolina, the men of which endeavored to keep peace in the city pending our visit.

Upon going ashore in a launch the first things which greeted me were some galling guns, most of which were dirty, half dressed soldiers were lazily sleeping. Incidentally I was interested in the way these galling guns were set; namely, so that they could not be turned on the city. This at once reminded me of a story that read that had been taken away from the policemen of the city and tin snovels given them instead, in order that they could do no damage. Certainly it was amusing to see these boy policemen talking about the city dressed as play soldiers with tin snovels such as a boy would purchase at any toy store.

The principal purpose of soldiers is to furnish voters. The law provides for an election of President about once in seven years, but no President has yet completed his term of service, and I have forgotten the large number who have served less than a year.

When a President is elected he brings to the capital his soldiers and these soldiers apparently form the electorate for the coming elections, which are held for various purposes. Certainly the gangs who control the politics of some of our large cities could get exceedingly valuable points by visiting this island. When the polls open the policemen and soldiers immediately vote. After performing this necessary function their further duty is to prevent any one else voting on the pretence of keeping order.

Hence it is evident that a revolution often performs a necessary and economic function. In Haytian government, in fact an American who is to-day residing in the city said: "These revolutions, Mr. Babson, are not so bad as they are painted, but rather are absolutely necessary at times. Moreover, they do not cost as much nor disturb business as seriously as do our Presidential elections in the States."

I was also interested to learn that the financing of these revolutions is an active and profitable industry. On a shipboard I learned about a man from California who had formed a company for financing revolutions in Hayti and certain Central American republics. Of course the securities of this company are very fluctuating in value, but I can tell you the profits are often exceedingly great and that the men who originally invested their money therein have received it back several times. A man whom I met on the steamer and who is very well acquainted with the head of this corporation said that he could get me some stock if I desired.

The policemen, I found from experience, are obliged to finance themselves. However, I saw no black-mailing. They were kind to you in a frank and kindly manner, holding out their hands, ask or a contribution. It is an unwritten law that if you ask the policeman a question you should feed him. This is similar to a custom which existed in parts of Greece when I first went there and travelled on the street cars. I found that the conductors were obliged, almost exclusively, to depend upon fees that they received from passengers who asked to be left at a certain street.

The Haytians are certainly not ashamed of their color, as has appeared at times to be the case with the negroes of our own country. To begin with, they have placed in the constitution of the land a clause so that only black men can legally own land. Hence when the bank, which is operated by American capital, desires to loan money on real estate and accept a mortgage as security it must work through a third party who must be a good black full blooded negro.

Not only have they proudly asserted their color in their constitution and laws, but it has likewise entered into their religion. The Virgin Mary and all the Apostles had been painted black and that it is the honest belief of many Haytians that these founders of the Church were black.

I barely escaped being involved in a row in the central post office, where I went to mail a letter to my office at Wellesley Hills. The postage on this letter amounted to about 40 cents, but for giving me this information one or two negroes in the lobby seemed to think it was necessary to be fed. I could not make out whether



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The President's palace, Port au Prince, Hayti.

these negroes expected a fee from me or the postmaster, but certainly there was a grand discussion. Had it not been for the iron railing separating the various combatants I am sure the post office would have been closed for the rest of the day owing to the inability of the employees to attend to business.

After this disturbance had been settled with the payment of some good American money I was asked if I would like to take the letter upstairs. Downstairs consisted of the general delivery department of the post office, lobby, &c., but the assortment of the mail and the examination of the mail bags (which probably is a very lucrative business in the island) is carried on upstairs.

I found that on the payment of five cents additional I had the personal privilege of carrying my letter upstairs and seeing it dropped into a big box or mail bag which presumably prevented its being stolen until the time of the departure of the New York mails. Certainly this is an improvement on any scheme of registration which I have yet seen, provided of course that the box is strong enough and that the key of the padlock is in the post office at New York.

After visiting this Haytian post office my next visit was at the office of the United States Consul. The day I called the Consul was not present, being at his home in one of the suburbs, but the Vice-Consul, who was an exceedingly obliging man, was present. Of course, like the rest of the good Haytians, he was black and a loyal subject. Moreover, he has been to this country and was an extremely intelligent and courteous person.

The Consul's office looked very much like a garage. It was made of stone with big open doors in front and windows without glass. If I remember correctly, however, the office was a palace compared with the building of the Haytian Chamber of Commerce. This is a stone building with the words "Chambre de Commerce" in large letters on the outside. I went there and, after considerable difficulty, obtained admittance, and was surprised to find the only occupant an old and disagreeable looking male.

The members of the chamber of commerce were at the market, and consequently I went to the market. Of all the markets in all the lands that I have visited this was the most interesting and the most uncleanly. Beneath an elaborate roof, about 500 by 250 feet, was a mass of surging humanity.

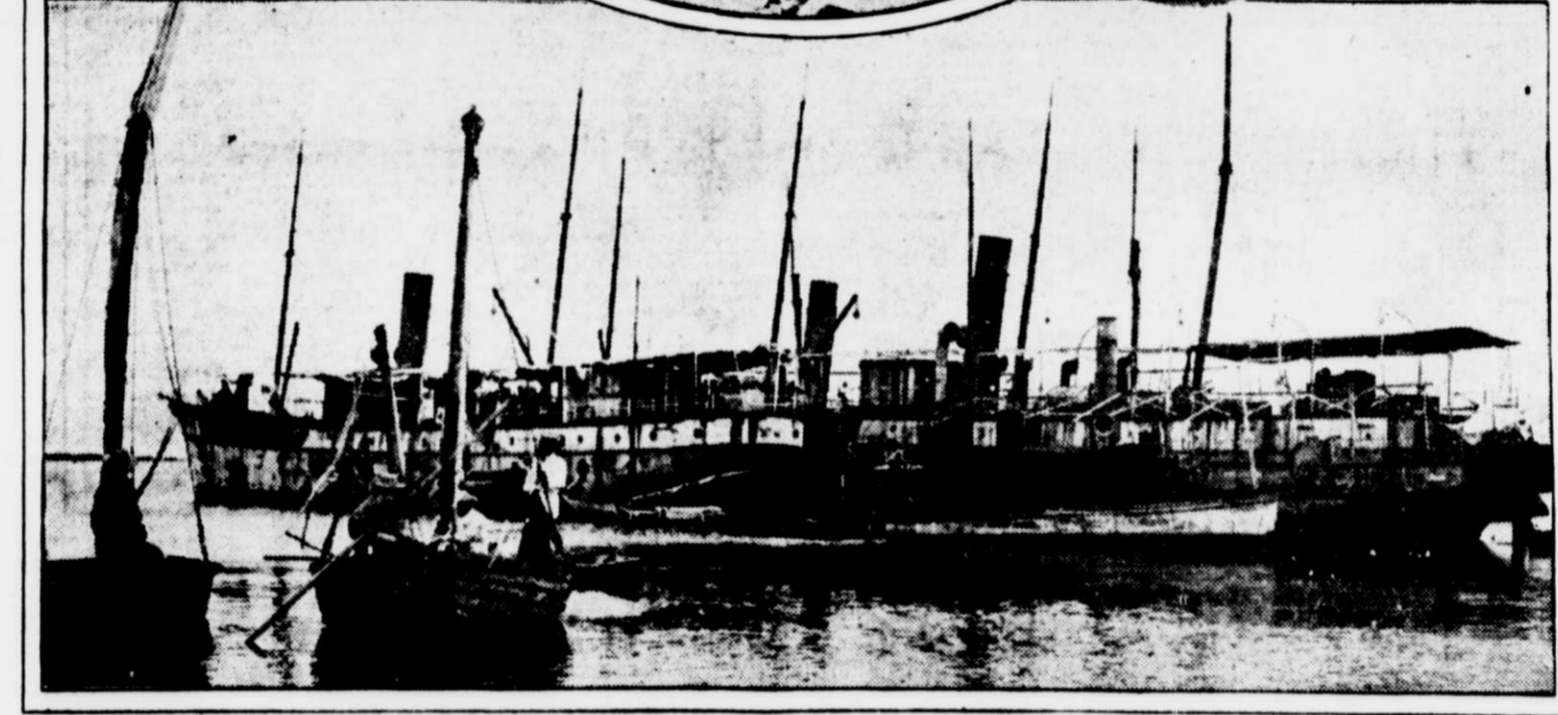
I roughly estimated that there must have been about 400 persons under this roof jabbering and dickering with one another. They were selling vegetables and fruits of every description, all kinds of birds and fowls, which were alive, and here and there were monkeys, turtles, pigs and various other specimens of the animal world, which were also adding their share to the general confusion.

Upon finding, however, that the people in this market had two sources of income, one source the selling of goods and the other picking pockets. They picked my pocket and the pockets of all visitors, including those who came to buy and those who came to sell. I think one of the foulest sights I ever saw was a woman in this crowd picking a pocket which she found to be her own. Unabashed she simply held up what she had found and put it back as a great joke upon herself.

The prices in this market were, of course, tempting. Grape fruit, 90 in a box, cost \$1.50 a box; bunches of bananas, 100 in a box, sold at 35 cents a bunch; while oranges sold for about 2 cents a dozen. Even greater bargains were obtained from peddlers. One of my traveling companions gave his guide 15 cents with which to purchase some oranges, and the man returned with a half bushel basket full and a couple of dozen bananas on top. Upon asking the guide how he was to get these on shipboard, he told him that the basket was included, and upon remonstrating with the guide for buying any bananas the guide replied that they were placed on top "to protect the oranges from the sun."

After reaching the ship he counted the oranges and found that there were fifty-seven, thus getting a good half bushel basket, fifty-seven oranges and two dozen bananas for 15 cents, and probably this 15 cents also provided a commission for the guide.

Some of our party had considerable trouble with their guides. One got into a rumper with his guide at the end of the day as to his payment and during the debate over \$900 was stolen from him, which made the day's trip rather expensive. Personally, I never have had any trouble with guides for shuffling with their guides. One got into a rumper with a small boy and I pass this suggestion on to others. Always select for a guide some one so small that you can spank him if any arguments are apt to come up. By



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The water front at Port au Prince. Above—A native vegetable seller.

all means never employ a guide as large as yourself.

Like the fruits, vegetables, monkeys and parrots, labor is cheap in Hayti. General labor is 24 cents a day, it being possible to hire all the men you desire for this sum, and they will work a good long day at that. The labor is void of any mentality. If skilled labor is desired, that is, carpenters, stone masons, &c., about 60 cents per day must be paid, but the best Haytian laborer is inferior to our youngest apprentice.

Of course, when I refer to prices it is American gold that I have in mind. The Haytian money is rather a nebulous proposition; to-day it is up and to-morrow it is down. I heard of a traveler who once had a twenty dollar bill changed into Haytian money and he was obliged to buy a basket in which to take the change back to the boat. By all means when visiting this island accept only American or English currency.

Not only are Haytian fruits and Haytian currency to be seen everywhere, but also Haytian children. After completing my business I had an hour or so to walk through the residential section down by the water, where the houses consist of one or two rooms, and I should say that every family had at least fifteen children. These children were mostly naked, although they did have on the proverbial smile.

Speaking of houses reminds me of chimneys. Out of something like 10,000 buildings in the city the only one which had a chimney was the cathedral. The cooking is done on the back porch with a sort of small charcoal stove, although the Standard Oil Company is now introducing oil stoves. In this connection let me say that I was told that it was impossible for the oil companies to get the Haytians to use oil stoves. Everywhere I saw natives with the name of a certain brand of flour printed in red letters on the back of their shirts. Upon inquiring as to the willingness of natives to be thus used for advertising

purposes I was informed that they quit eating breadfruit and yams and bought American flour for the primary purpose of obtaining these bags for use as shirts!

Believing that this same principle could be used in packing other goods, I passed it along to readers who are interested in developing export trade to the West Indies or Central and South America.

Speaking of foods, I wonder if readers recognize what an important function the banana and coconut play in these southern countries. The banana of course is ever present, it being used for breakfast, dinner and supper. The green bananas are boiled as vegetables, the ripe bananas are fried and medium bananas are used for various other purposes. The coconuts supply food, milk, oil and straw besides another very useful article, namely, fertilizer.

I was much interested in the methods of conservation used by these Haytians. For instance, the boy and his donkey are fed at the same time with the same food. For every donkey which a Haytian has he employs a donkey boy, and when it comes meal time he gives the donkey boy a piece of sugar cane.

The donkey boy and the donkey thereupon get in the shade of a building and the boy begins to strip the sugar cane with his teeth. He commences chewing the cane, obtaining what juice he can therefrom. He then removes the refuse from his mouth, giving it to the donkey. Thus the same sticks of sugar cane feed the boy and the donkey, both having a good meal and being happy. About one-fourth of a cent's worth of sugar cane serves this purpose and none of it is wasted. In the same way coconuts are used and various other articles of food.

It is interesting to see how the forests of the island provide almost everything for the use of man. The fundamental reason why these people are lazy is really because they do not need to work. There are products of the forest which seem to supply every want. I even saw soap berries for sale. These are berries which, if wrung between the hands, provide a soapy substance which is a perfect substitute.

The only things I noticed in Hayti which truly seemed extravagant were the boats used by some of the natives. These were made of mahogany. I suppose every one has heard of Santo Domingo mahogany, for mahogany trees are said to be more plentiful on the island than are spruce trees in northern Maine. Certainly it seems so

when one finds that the poorest natives have their boats made out of mahogany. Moreover, these ships must be made from splendid logs, for each boat consists of one log simply hollowed out, first with an axe and then with a chisel, with the ends and bottom properly shaped. In every little inlet and harbor may be found these boats, together with larger sailboats. Transportation is almost entirely carried on either in these small boats or by pack teams of donkeys. On the larger boats entire families live, and they seem to be always cooking the evening present banana, a bunch of which one will see hanging on the beam of the sail in place of the Haytian flag.

In addition to a negro, his family and a small crew, each of these little coasting vessels has one or more parrots and perhaps a monkey and pet turtle aboard. Whether these animals are kept as household pets or for commercial purposes, I do not know; but I found that around the wharves was the place to buy them. The market price for these various animals quoted in Wall Street terms, at Port au Prince is as follows:

	Asked	Bid	Rate
Green parrots	1.00	.75	12.50
Monkeys	1.00	.75	12.50
Red and yellow parrots	1.00	.75	12.50
Turtles	1.00	.75	12.50

It is not to be seen that the same variance exists between the asked price and the price at which goods may really be purchased in Hayti as is found in Italy, Spain, Turkey and most other southern countries. Why there should be any connection between this method of trading and climatic conditions I do not know, but all who travel have found that fixed prices exist only in the temperate zone; that the further north one goes the more firmly prices are held, while the nearer the equator one goes, the more necessary it is to hicker and trade.

The railroad service in Hayti is very poor, but there is one consoling feature, namely, that there is very little of it. There is one line which operates from Port au Prince about sixty-six miles into the country and will some day connect with Cape Haytian, which is about 200 miles distant. There are also two other short lines on the island, which have been financed by Americans.

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A department store in the tropics, Hayti.

The trains run at irregular intervals and the accommodations are very poor. I remember meeting an American and his wife, very proper people from Connecticut, who attempted to ride inland on one of these railroads to visit a relative who was a Consul. There was only one passenger car on their train, which car was exceedingly crowded; for, in addition to the regular travel which had been accumulating for some days, what should pile in at the last moment but an Italian opera troupe containing from twenty to thirty jolly girls.

As there were about twice as many people in the car as there were seats, the getting seated caused commotion; but this was nothing to what happened at the first stop. Here a good natured bull fighter, full of liquor, with a revolver and a belt filled with cartridges, boarded the train and insisted upon having a seat. There was no objection on the part of the passengers to his having a seat, and, in fact, all rose at once to give him a seat.

But his kindness seemed to come to the front, and he insisted that every one else should sit down. Unfortunately, under the circumstances, the passengers were not all so willing to sit down as they were to rise; but he was determined that every one should have a seat, and, therefore, threatened to shoot any one who stood up. I cannot tell the story as did the poor Connecticut lady, who had never before been out of New England; but between his threatening to shoot every one who stood up and to hug every one who sat down, in addition to the fact that the trip consumed nearly a whole day, it was a day of great excitement on this national railroad of Hayti. Now, to more serious subjects.

I do not like to tell about the opportunities for getting gold, silver and precious stones in any country. My experience along mining lines has been that when a man has set out to find such things he has not obtained them, while they have been found by one who was not looking for them. It is, however, generally admitted that Hayti is the richest undeveloped mineral country in the world at the present time. Very little mining is being carried on there, and yet natives are continually bringing from the mountains nuggets of gold and excellent specimens of silver, copper and iron ore.

Certainly Columbus found gold on the island, while the Spaniards, working in their crude way, carried away millions of dollars worth of the precious metal. Therefore, there must be tremendous opportunities for mining on the island of Hayti. However, what is underground appeals to me more than what is underground. I was especially impressed with the virgin forests which contain all the most valuable kinds of wood. Mahogany is comparatively abundant, but the most valuable is the mahogany. The mahogany is a tree which grows to a height of 100 feet, and its wood is of a fine, even texture, and is very durable. It is used for a variety of purposes, and is highly valued by the natives.

Still Hayti's possibilities do not rest with her mining and timber prospects alone. The greatest asset of this island, to my mind, is the wonderful soil—loam extending from one to two feet deep. In this loam almost anything can be grown. Tropical fruits and vegetables of every description may be raised on this soil.

Not only is the soil perfect but by going to different elevations almost any kind of climate can be enjoyed. The temperature varies from 70 to 80 degrees throughout the year. It is hot in the sun, but always cool in the shade, while the ever present trade winds blow continually across the island. It therefore seems to me that so far as nature's gifts are concerned this island is the garden spot of the world. Certainly it must have been so when man found it, and the only sore spots on it to-day are those made by the hand of man.

Not only is this island rich in soil and climate, with a fair amount of rainfall, but it is blessed with a number of excellent harbors. The great "out" about South America, especially the northern coast, is the lack of good harbors. This also applies to Central America and many of the islands of the West Indies group.

The islands of Cuba and Hayti, however, possess some wonderful natural harbors, although in the case of Hayti only a very few of these have in any way been developed. It seems almost a dream, but here a short distance from New York is this island with wonderful harbors situated

Soil Wonderfully Rich—Mahogany So Plentiful That Natives Use It to Make Their Boats

only by a handful of natives living in two or three huts. On the extreme northwestern corner of Hayti, only a few miles from the eastern end of Cuba, is an example of one of these excellent harbors, known as Port de Paix.

Some day a big city is certain to be located here and a railroad will run from this port directly across the island to a similar port at the extreme eastern end, which is also at present undeveloped. It is now possible to take a train from New York to Key West, ferry across to Havana and travel by rail the whole length of Cuba to the eastern end. Only a few hours sail would bring one from the eastern terminus of the Cuban railroad into this beautiful harbor of Port de Paix. If there were a cross island railroad one could reach Porto Rico in a few hours. Twenty-five years from now this will be the quickest way to travel to Porto Rico, which is now rapidly developing under United States control. However, no development along this line has yet taken place and the location for a valuable wharf in this harbor of Port de Paix may now be obtained for perhaps \$100.

This is simply one of many illustrations which I could give of the great opportunities existing in this island for a soldier of fortune who wishes to go there with little capital. True, it is no place for meretricious women and children. Moreover, any man who succeeds here must be able to speak French and work with and through colored people.

A man going to this island must continually keep in mind that the island belongs to the blacks and that he can win only by working for the blacks, with the blacks and as the blacks want to work. The idea that a white man can develop the island of Hayti in the same spirit in which he would develop a Southern State of our own country is wrong. The blacks of Hayti cannot be treated like the blacks of America.

I have tried to give a brief account of this great undeveloped island together with its advantages and disadvantages, opportunities and drawbacks. I also have related certain stories to illustrate the actual conditions existing there to-day. I do not wish to close, however, without drawing a moral.

These people have what most people consider the three fundamentals of civilization, namely, wealth, freedom and a church. Regarding the unbounted wealth of the island there can be no dispute; in fact, the greatest drawback is that the country is so rich that the natives are able to live without working and exist on simply the fruits of the soil.

The island also possesses the greatest freedom in accordance with the "theory" of democracy. Not only are Hayti and Santo Domingo republics in the theoretical sense of the word, but, as I have stated, in the nation of Hayti no one but a black is permitted by the Constitution to own land. Of course, it is difficult to draw a line between unlimited democracy and limited anarchy; but the Haytians are certainly allowed to govern themselves with little internal or external interference.

Moreover, this is not a heathen island, for the church, as an organization, has a great foothold here, and has had for several hundred years. In short, I can prove to any one that the people of this island probably possess as great wealth, freedom and church opportunities as any people anywhere on the globe. Yet they show the greatest state of civilization. What is the reason?

A closer study of the situation shows that this island lacks an educational system, and it is recognized that the island will remain undeveloped only when some well planned educational system is introduced, maintained by the necessary economic pressure. Wealth, freedom and religion, separate or combined, are useless excepting in conjunction with a worth while educational system. It is the duty of the world to provide this for the people of this island, and the world is a great lesson in this especially to those who think the problems of America can be solved by simply dividing riches, providing free dumps and building churches.

Certainly an amount of prosperity is necessary for the development of any people; moreover, this must be accompanied with reasonable freedom, while worth while religion is most important. Nevertheless, real progress comes only as these three wealth, freedom and religion, are combined and developed. It is worth while educational system backed up by an honest treasury. Such an educational system and such a treasury are what Hayti needs.

Without them the island will continue to be a sore spot upon the face of the globe, but with them it can become the garden spot of the Western Hemisphere. Moreover, the same reasoning will apply to any nation, whether as great as Russia or as small as France. But I'll say no more about education. The first and immediate need is a decent treasury. The opportunity at present is favorable for securing the consent of our own Government and of whatever government exists in Hayti to a system of administration modeled after that provided for in our own country. This is especially needed in Hayti, for the Haytians are far less advanced in civilization and in capacity for self-government than are the Dominicans.

We have done well in Santo Domingo, and we should do so well in the other portion of the island. Not only have we established Dominican credit but we have been able to check a revolution by informing the revolutionists that even if they should overthrow the Government, they would have to pay the same taxes and would have to stop the fight or see their nation acted as a medium of exchange between the Government and revolutionary leaders. They would not be mutually satisfactory compromise. A fairly civilized education, a decent treasury and a system of self-government. Let us do the same in Hayti. Remove the temptation of a rich treasury and one of the greatest sources of revolution will be removed.